

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 6350

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4
TAGS: PINS, SY
SUBJ: SYRIAN INTERNAL SITUATION

1. FOREIGN MINISTRY DIRECTOR OF AMERICAN AFFAIRS SHOUI TOLD
CHARG OCTOBER 6 HE THOUGHT PRESIDENT ASSAD HAD MADE A
SERIOUS MISTAKE IN LAUNCHING THE ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN.
ASSAD HAD BEEN TOLD BY MEMBERS OF THE BAATH PARTY COMMAND
THAT HE COULD NOT SUCCEED IN SUCH A CAMPAIGN UNLESS HE
CLIPPED THE WINGS OF HIS BROTHER RIF'AT. THESE COMMENTS
HAD MADE ASSAD VERY ANGRY, SOUFI SAID, AND ADDED THAT IS
IS WELL KNOWN ASSAD WILL NOT LISTEN TO CRITICISM OF HIS
BROTHER.

2. ASKED HIS VIEWS OF WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE LATEST
EXPLOSIONS IN DAMASCUS, SHOUI REPLIED BLUNTLY, "ALI DUBA"
(DIRECTOR OF MILITARY INTELLIGENCE). HE EXPLAINED THAT
THESE EXPLOSIONS WERE MEANT AS WARNING TO THE ASSAD BROTHERS
THAT THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST CORRUPTION HAD GONE FAR ENOUGH AND
ALSO THAT THE IDEA OF ELECTING A NEW REGIONAL COMMAND WAS
A NO -STARTER. THE EXPLOSIONS WERE INTENDED TO SHOW THAT
OTHERS WERE PREPARED TO BE JUST AS RUTHLESS AS RIF'AT. THE
IDEA OF CONVENING AN EXTRAORDINARY REGIONAL CONGRESS OF THE
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PARTY WAS NOW DEAD, SHOUI SAID. HE ALSO THOUGHT THE ANTI-
CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN WOULD SOON DIE DOWN INCONCLUSIVELY.

3. SOUFI SAID ASSAD WAS NOW IN A DILEMMA. HIS ANTI-
CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN COULD NOT BE SUCCESSFUL UNLESS HE MOVED
AGAINST HIS BROTHER. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE NEEDED RIF'AT
TO BALANCE HIS OTHER GROUP OF MILITARY SUPPORTERS. (SHOUI

MENTIONED NAJI JAMIL, ABD AL-GHANI IBRAHIM AND ALI DUBA AS FORMING THE CORE OF THIS GROUP.) IF RIF'AT WERE WEAKENED OR REMOVED, ASSAD WOULD HAVE NO COUNTERBALANCE TO THESE OFFICERS AND SOONER OR LATER THEY COULD MOVE AGAINST HIM.

4. SHOEFI SPECULATED THAT PERHAPS THE UNITED STATES HAD ENCOURAGED ASSAD TO LAUNCH THE ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN, KNOWING THAT IT CONTAINED THE SEEDS OF THIS OWN DOWNFALL. EMBELLISHING HIS THEME, SHOEFI SPECULATED THAT WITH PEACE PROSPECTS IMPROVING, THE US NEEDED A MORE REPRESENTATIVE LEADER IN SYRIA WHO COULD SPEAK FOR THE WHOLE COUNTRY RATHER THAN A MEMBER OF A MINORITY SECT WHO WAS OPPOSED BY MOST OF THE COUNTRY'S SUNNI MAJORITY. HE SMILINGLY DISMISSED DENIALS TO THIS THEORY.

5. COMMENT: SHOEFI'S COMMENTS ARE PARTICULARLY INTERESTING IN LIGHT OF THE CURRENT ALERT OF RIF'AT'S FORCES AND RUMORS OF RENEWED TENSIONS AMONG MEMBERS OF THE REGIONAL COMMAND. HE DID NOT SEEM TO FEEL THAT A SHOWDOWN WAS NEAR OR THAT THE PRESIDENT WAS IN ANY PARTICULAR DANGER.
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